

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 17094 141209Z
ACTION HA-05

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 17094

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF
SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES: LOWMAN'S CALL ON THE UNHCR REGIONAL
REPRESENTATIVE

REF: BANGKOK 16118

1. ORM OFFICE DIRECTOR LOWMAN JUNE 12 CALLED ON LESLIE GOODYEAR, UNHCR REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR WESTERN SOUTH ASIA. GOODYEAR REITERATED HIS COMMENTS ABOUT THE CURRENT RELAXATION IN THE THAI ATTITUDE TOWARD REFUGEES THAT HE HAD RELATED TO THE AMBASSADOR JUNE 5 (REFTEL). HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THERE WERE THREE SITUATIONS THAT COULD POISON THIS ATTITUDE: A NEW LARGE INFLUX FROM LAOS; (UNDEFINED) MEASURES AGAINST THE CHINESE IN VIETNAM; AND A RISE IN THE BOAT CASE POPULATION. ON THE LAST ISSUE HE NOTED THAT THERE WAS AN IMPROVED ATMOSPHERE IN SONGKHLA, AND THE POTENTIAL OF IMPROVED FACILITIES FOR REFUGEES THEREKZ IF THE GOM REACTED AGAINST THE CURRENT HIGH INFLUX OF REFUGEES INTO MALAYSIA BY CANCELLING THEIR HOSPITALITY, THE THAI WOULD INEVITABLY DO THE SAME.

2 . LOWMAN ASKED WHETHER THE UNHCR COULD ASSIGN A FIELD
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OFFICER TO EACH BOAT CAMP. GOODYEAR SAID THAT THE ONE FIELD OFFICER NOW COVERING BOTH CAMPS WAS OF THE OPINION THAT THERE WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH FOR TWO TO DO. ASSIGNMENT OF HIS PERSONNEL RESOURCES IN THAILAND WAS A QUESTION OF PRIORITIES, AND THE CURRENT PRIORITY WAS THE NORTHEAST. HE HAS A TRAVELING LEGAL OFFICER WHO RUSHES IN DURING EMERGENCIES. GOODYEAR SAID HE WOULD REMAIN FLEXIBLE, HOWEVER, ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF ASSIGNING AN OFFICER TO

EACH BOAT CAMP.

3. GOODYEAR NOTED THAT THE PRINCIPAL PROBLEM FOR BOAT REFUGEES COMING TO THAILAND WAS WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM OUT AT SEA. THERE WAS LITERALLY NOT ONE IN A HUNDRED THAT GOT THROUGH UNSCATHED. THE UNHCR DISCUSSED THIS SITUATION WITH THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, AND SINCE THEN THE ATMOSPHERE HAS CHANGED. INSTEAD OF DISCOUNTING STORIES OF PIRACY AND RAPE, THE THAI ARE NOW CREDITING THEM AND ATTEMPTING TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THEM. GOODYEAR ATTRIBUTED THIS CHANGE TO PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK CHOMANAN'S CONCERN FOR THAILAND'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE.

4. GOODYEAR ALSO CITED POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS FOR LAND REFUGEES. KRIANGSAK HAS ANNOUNCED THAT NO ONE WILL BE SENT BACK. EVEN LT COL KAMON PRACHUABMO (ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE DISPLACED PERSONS OPERATING CENTER) HAS PUBLICLY STATED THAT THE RTG WOULD ABANDON ITS POST NOVEMBER 15 EXCLUSIONARY POLICY BECAUSE IT WAS NOT WORKING. THE THREE DETENTION CENTERS THAT THE RTG SET UP AS A RESULT OF THAT POLICY HAD THE POSSIBILITY OF COMING UNDER UNHCR SUPPORT. GOODYEAR SAID HE HAD INFORMED THE THAI OF UNHCR WILLINGNESS TO DO SO IF THESE CENTERS COULD TAKE ON THE COMPLETE ASPECT OF REFUGEE CAMPS. THAT ASPECT WOULD INCLUDE NO THREAT OF FORCED REPATRIATION AND FREE ACCESSIBILITY FOR MIGRATION MISSIONS. LOWMAN SUGGESTED THAT THE UNHCR MIGHT WISH TO CONSIDER INFORMING THE THAI ABOUT ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY FOR TWO OF THEM, WITH THE CONDITION THAT THE RTG MOVE THE REFUGEES IN

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THE BURIRAM CENTER TO A CAMP LIKE SURIN, AND CLOSE UP BURIRAM. KEEPING REFUGEES IN AN EXPROVINCIAL PRISON WAS NOT A GOOD IDEA. 5. LOWMAN SAID THAT HE HOPED TO DISCUSS LOCAL SETTLEMENT WITH GOODYEAR WHEN LOWMAN RETURNS TO THAILAND IN EARLY JULY. WHITEHOUSE

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